

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a).**

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name Marias River Bridge

Other names/site number 24TL401/MDT Identification No. L51306006+06001

## 2. Location

street & number Milepost 6 on Marias Valley Road (old US Highway 91) ☐ not for publication

city of town Five miles south of Shelby ☒ vicinity

State Montana code MT county Toole code 101 zip code 59474

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination    request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets    does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

   national X statewide X local

Signature of certifying official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property    meets    does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

   entered in the National Register

   determined eligible for the National Register

   determined not eligible for the National Register

   removed from the National Register

   other (explain:)

Marias River Bridge

Name of Property

Toole County, Montana

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## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- |                                     |                  |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Private          |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | public – Local   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | public – State   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | public - Federal |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Private          |

### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box)

- |                                     |             |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | building(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | district    |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | site        |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | structure   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | building(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | object      |

### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
		buildings
		sites
1		structures
		Objects
		buildings
1	0	<b>Total</b>

### Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Montana's Historic Steel Stringer and Steel Girder  
Bridges, 1901-1961

### Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

## 6. Function or Use

### Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION/Road-related (vehicular) =  
Bridge

### Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION/Road-related (vehicular) =  
Bridge

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Steel Girder Bridge

### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Concrete

walls:

roof:

other: Concrete, Metal: steel

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### **Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

#### **Summary Paragraph**

The Marias River Bridge consists of one contributing structure, a steel girder bridge built in 1936. The bridge is located on a segment of US Highway 91 now known as Marias Valley Road. The two-span structure is 545 feet long and 27 feet wide. It is representative of the type of steel girder bridges designed and built by the Montana Highway Department during the 1930s. There have been no significant changes to the structure since its construction and, with the exception of Interstate 15, there are no major changes in the setting of the property.

### **Narrative Description**

The Marias River Bridge is located in north central Montana about five miles south of the City of Shelby on a bypassed segment of US Highway 91 that now serves as a frontage road. It is located on rolling grass plains comprised of the sedimentary sandstones and shales of the Fort Union Formation. The land was sculpted by ice sheets during the Bull Lake Ice Age about 70,000 years ago. The front range of the Rocky Mountains dominate the landscape to the west. The area surrounding the bridge is utilized for agricultural purposes.<sup>1</sup>

The Marias River Bridge is a two-span steel girder structure with four steel stringer approach spans. The bridge has an overall length of 545 feet long and is 27 feet wide with a roadway width of 24 feet. There are two 120-foot girder spans. Each steel stringer span is 76 feet in length. The bridge ends rest on reinforced concrete abutments and the bridge spans rest on five solid reinforced concrete piers.

The steel superstructure of the bridge consists of two steel girder spans. Each span consists of four steel girders with two riveted girder spans reinforced with steel angle section stiffeners on the exterior sides of the bridge. The girders are connected by steel I-beam floor beams on each span. Angle section bottom lateral braces provide addition support for the spans. The concrete slab deck rests directly on the girders. The curbs and guardrails overhang the deck and are supported by steel I-beam braces. The concrete guardrails are double-coursed Art Deco style structures typical to Montana Highway Department-designed bridges between 1929 and 1941. They consist of double coursed concrete rails tilted at a 45° angle and supported by tapered concrete posts with beveled caps. The guardrails are anchored at the ends by concrete endposts with decorative recessed bush-hammered panels on the interior sides and three vertical grooves on the exterior sides. Steel I-beam guardrails have been bolted to the posts adjacent to the roadway.

The main spans are reached by four 76-foot steel I-beam stringer approach spans. The concrete decks are supported by eight lines of steel I-beam stringers. The approach spans display the same guardrails as the main spans.

#### **Integrity**

The Marias River Bridge retains excellent integrity. All of its original steel components are intact and unchanged. The bridge does suffer from some deterioration of the steel components (de-lamination and corrosion) and the concrete substructure. These problems, however, are common to bridges of this age. The only modification is to the guardrails where steel W-beam rails were bolted to the concrete guardrails sometime within the last 35 years. The setting of the site is compromised somewhat by the close proximity of the Interstate 15 bridges over the Marias River.

<sup>1</sup> David Alt and Donald W. Hyndman, *Roadside Geology of Montana*, (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing, 1991), 278.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Engineering

Transportation

### Period of Significance

1936-1961

### Significant Dates

1936

### Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

### Cultural Affiliation

### Architect/Builder

Montana Highway Department

Thomas Staunton

### Period of Significance (justification)

The Period of Significance for this historic property encompasses the year it was constructed through the historic period when it served as a component of US Highway 91 in north central Montana. The bridge is still in use.

### Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

The Marias River Bridge is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under criteria A and C. The bridge is eligible under Criterion A because of its association with the make-work New Deal programs of the Great Depression and the Montana Highway Department's attempt to modernize the state's roads utilizing federal funds available from that program. The bridge is also significant as an intact example of the highway department's standard steel girder bridge built from circa 1930 to 1941. The bridge retains all of its original components and features and is an excellent representative of the type.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance)

The Marias River Bridge can be listed on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with the Montana Highway Department's road and bridge programs during the New Deal of the 1930s. The bridge was part of an extensive program by the highway department to improve and modernize Montana's transportation system utilizing federal funds during the Great Depression. The bridge was constructed under New Deal regulations and represents how the program was designed to maximize labor while minimizing the use of heavy machinery. It also represents the transition from the construction of steel truss structures to girder bridges that began during the Great Depression.

The bridge is also an excellent and intact example of the type of steel girder bridge designed and built by the Montana Highway Department in the 1930s. The bridge retains all of the structural components standard to steel girder bridges built during that period. The design reflects the pervasive Art Deco influence of the 1930s, specifically the concrete guardrails and overhanging deck. The bridge is an excellent example of the type and is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C.

**Engineering Significance**

The Marias River Bridge is an excellent example of the standard steel girder bridge designed and built by the Montana Highway Department during the 1930s. During the Great Depression, steel girder bridges began to replace steel truss structures as the highway department's preferred river crossing. The bridges were efficient and didn't have the height and width restrictions of the steel trusses. They were economical to construct and required less steel than the truss structures, which made them more attractive to the department's engineers. This structure retains all of the elements standard to the design including the deep, angle-section stiffened riveted exterior girders, the steel I-beam interior girders, floor beams, and concrete slab deck. The Art Deco-style concrete guardrails were standard to all steel girder, stringer, and concrete bridges from 1929 to 1941. The Marias River Bridge is representative of state-designed reinforced concrete T-beam bridges built between about 1929 and 1941.

**Developmental history/additional historic context information** (if appropriate)

On 30 August 1935, the Montana State Highway Commission awarded a contract to Great Falls contractor Thomas Staunton to build a "reinforced concrete and steel bridge over the Marias River on the Shelby – Conrad" section of US Highway 91 in Toole County. Staunton was one of six companies that bid on the project; he won it with a low bid of \$74,976. The Minneapolis Steel & Machinery Company supplied the structural steel for the bridge, while the Seattle-based Northwest Steel Rolling Mills provided the reinforcing steel for the piers and the concrete deck. Staunton completed the project on time and without incident sometime in 1936.<sup>2</sup>

**Thomas Staunton**

Born in England in 1878, Thomas Staunton was one of Montana's most active road and bridge builders in the 1930s. His family emigrated to the United States and settled in Minnesota in 1880. Staunton moved to Great Falls, Montana in 1906 and worked as an agent for the George L. Tracy Company, a wholesale grocer. His career as a contractor began about

<sup>2</sup> The construction file for this bridge has not survived. Montana State Highway Commission Meeting Minutes, Book 6, 334, 335 (30 August 1935); Bridge Condition Survey No. 151-0910-0029, Montana Department of Transportation, Helena, Montana.

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1916 when he formed a partnership with James Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald & Staunton operated as general coal and railroad contractors until 1926, when they dissolved their association. For several years, Staunton was the vice president of F. J. Gies company, wholesale grocers and also had interests in the Kincaid Motor Company and two breweries in Spokane, Washington.<sup>3</sup>

Staunton began a six year professional relationship with Evarts Blakeslee, a former SHC Resident Engineer and independent contractor, in 1936. The Staunton & Blakeslee company built several reinforced concrete bridges in Montana until 1942 when the partnership was dissolved because of a lack of local work caused by the demand of the Second World War. Possibly because of his bad experience with the Montana Highway Department's Milwaukee Road Railroad Overpass project in Missoula, Staunton purchased a cattle ranch south of Great Falls near Cascade, Montana in 1937. In 1943, he retired from the general contracting business to devote full-time to his ranch. Thomas Staunton died in Great Falls after a lengthy illness in April 1956.<sup>4</sup>

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Alt, David and Donald W. Hyndman. *Roadside Geology of Montana*. (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing, 1991).

Axline, Jon. *Conveniences Sorely Needed: Montana's Historic Highway Bridges, 1860-1956*. (Helena: Montana Historical Society, 2005).

Bridge Condition Survey No. 151-0910-0029. Montana Department of Transportation. Helena, Montana.

Bridge Inspection Record No. L51306006+06001. Montana Department of Transportation. Helena, Montana.

Montana State Highway Commission Meeting Minutes. Montana Department of Transportation. Helena, Montana.

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)  
☐ previously listed in the National Register  
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register  
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark  
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

### Primary location of additional data:

☐ State Historic Preservation Office  
☒ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☐ University  
☐ Other

Name of repository: **Montana Department of Transportation**

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): \_\_\_\_\_

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 2.0

(do not include previously listed resource acreage)

<sup>3</sup> "T. Staunton, Rancher and Businessman, Dies," *Great Falls Tribune*, April 9, 1956; Great Falls City Directory, 1906 - 1934.

<sup>4</sup> "T. Staunton . . . Dies," *Great Falls Tribune*, April 9, 1956; Great Falls City Directory, 1935 - 1956.

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### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	<u>12</u> Zone	<u>434186</u> Easting	<u>5363957</u> Northing	3	<u>          </u> Zone	<u>          </u> Easting	<u>          </u> Northing
2	<u>          </u> Zone	<u>          </u> Easting	<u>          </u> Northing	4	<u>          </u> Zone	<u>          </u> Easting	<u>          </u> Northing

### Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)

The boundary for the Marias River Bridge measures 545 x 30 feet and encompasses the bridge and its approaches on both sides of the river. The boundary is centered on the bridge.

### Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

Boundaries for the Marias River Bridge are drawn to encompass the six spans of the bridge, its immediate approaches and that portion of the river spanned by the bridge. The width is increased beyond the measurements of the structure to include the piers and abutments.

### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jon Axline/Historian

organization Montana Department of Transportation

date November 18, 2009

street & number 2701 Prospect Avenue

telephone (406) 444-6258

city or town Helena

state MT

zip code 59620-1001

e-mail [jaxline@mt.gov](mailto:jaxline@mt.gov)

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

### Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive black and white photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

(See Continuation Sheets)

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**Property Owner:**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Montana Department of Transportation  
street & number 2701 Prospect Avenue telephone 406-444-6200  
city or town Helena state MT zip code 59602-1001

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, PO Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.



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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

### Marias River Bridge

Name of Property

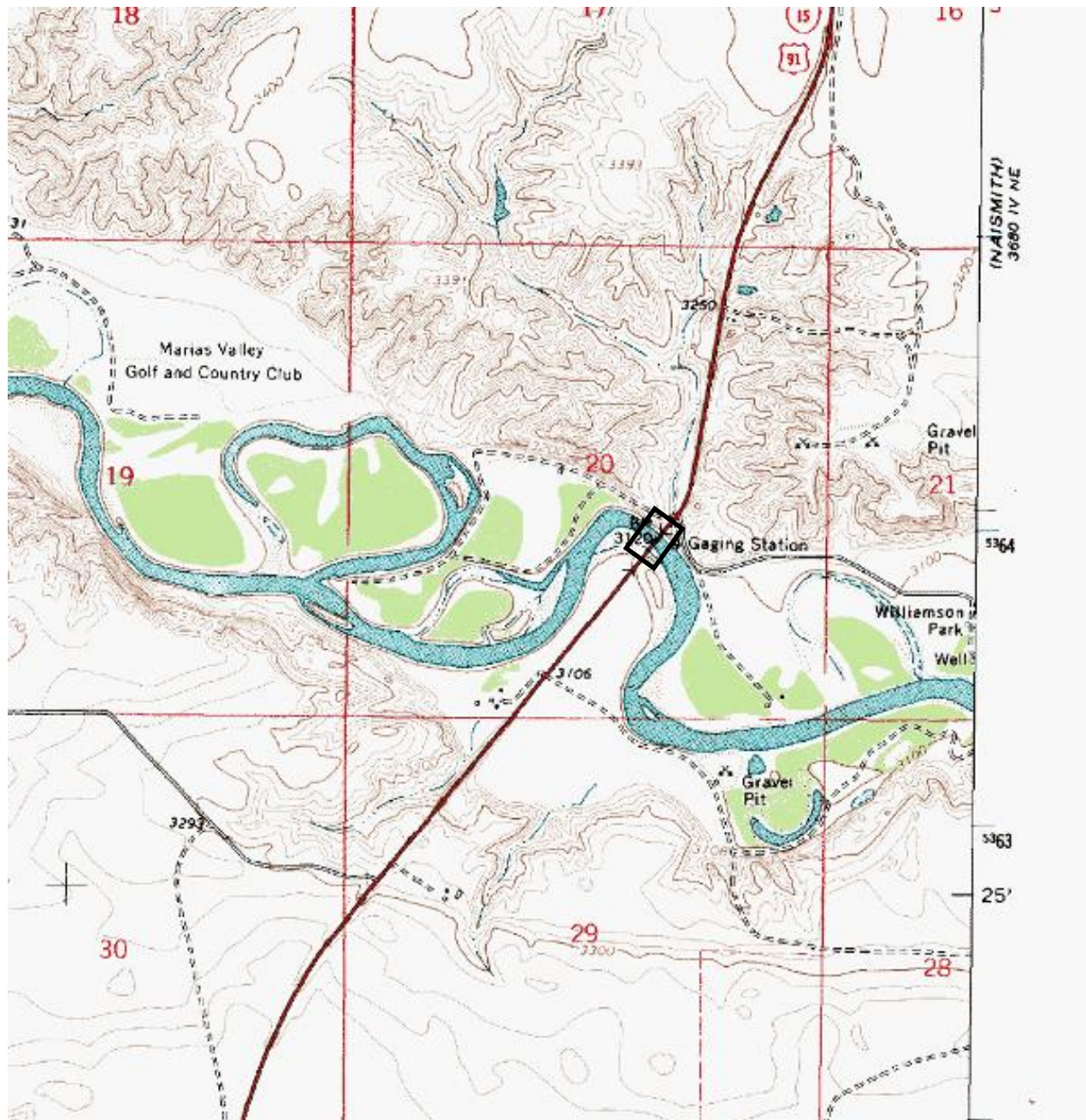
Toole, MT

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Montana's Historic Steel Stringer and Steel  
Girder Bridges, 1901-1961

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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Ledger NW, Montana USGS Quadrangle Map, 1971

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Section number Photographs Page 10

Name: Marias River Bridge  
County and State: Toole County, Montana  
Photographer: Kristi Hager  
Date of Photograph: 2005  
Location of original negative: Montana Department of Transportation. Helena, Montana.  
Description and view of camera: West profile. View to the northeast  
Photograph: 0001

Name: Marias River Bridge  
County and State: Toole County, Montana  
Photographer: Kristi Hager  
Date of Photograph: 2005  
Location of original negative: Montana Department of Transportation. Helena, Montana.  
Description and view of camera: East profile. View to the west  
Photograph: 0002

Name: Marias River Bridge  
County and State: Yellowstone County, Montana  
Photographer: Kristi Hager  
Date of Photograph: 2005  
Location of original negative: Montana Department of Transportation. Helena, Montana.  
Description and view of camera: West profile. View to the northeast  
Photograph: 0003

Name: Marias River Bridge  
County and State: Yellowstone County, Montana  
Photographer: Kristi Hager  
Date of Photograph: 2005  
Location of original negative: Montana Department of Transportation. Helena, Montana.  
Description and view of camera: Detail. View to the east  
Photograph: 0004

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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Photo 0001. Marias River Bridge. West profile. View to the northeast.



Photo 0002. Marias River Bridge. East Profile. View to the west

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Photo 0003. Marias River Bridge. west profile. View to the northeast

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Photo 0004. Marias River Bridge. Detail. View to the east